

Message Text

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PAGE 01 WELLIN 03248 150520Z

21

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-01

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FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8780

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

CINCPAC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE WELLINGTON 3248

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT PGOV NZ

SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS RESULT IN UNPLEASANT SURPRISES FOR LABOUR

BEGIN SUMMARY: LOCAL ELECTIONS HELD OCT 12 RESULTED IN SOME UNPLEASANT SURPRISES FOR THE LABOUR PARTY. ALTHOUGH LOCAL ELECTIONS HERE ARE USUALLY DEVOID OF NATIONAL POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE, MANY OBSERVERS SEE SATURDAY'S RESULTS AS INDICATING A MAJOR SWING AGAINST LABOUR NATIONALLY. END SUMMARY.

1. BY FAR THE MOST UNEXPECTED RESULT OF THE ELECTIONS WAS THE WELLINGTON MAYORAL RACE. WITH SOME 2,000 ABSENTEE BALLOTS YET TO BE COUNTED, LABOUR INCUMBENT SIR FRANCIS KITTS, WELLINGTON MAYOR FOR 18 YEARS, IS LOSING BY 366 VOTES TO CITY COUNCIL MEMBER MICHAEL FOWLER. THE COUNT CONTRASTS MARKEDLY WITH KITTS' 11,000 VOTE MAJORITY IN 1971. AT THAT TIME KITTS RECEIVED 71 PERCENT OF THE ABSENTEE VOTES CAST AND HE HOPES FOR A REPEAT PERFORMANCE WHICH WOULD SHIFT THE BALANCE OF THE TOTAL VOTE IN HIS FAVOR. A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO KITTS' PROBLEMS WAS THE CAMPAIGN OF VALUES PARTY CANDIDATE TONY BRUNT. BRUNT

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PAGE 02 WELLIN 03248 150520Z

POLLED 5,559 VOTES, MOST OF WHICH WOULD PROBABLY HAVE

OTHERWISE GONE TO LABOUR.

2. LABOUR CHALLENGERS WERE DEFEATED IN AUCKLAND AND DUNEDIN, AS WAS CHIRSTCHURCH INCUMBENT LABOUR MAYOR NEVILLE PICKERING. WHILE ALL THREE RESULTS WERE PREDICTABLE, THE SIZE OF SIR DOVE-MEYER ROBINSON'S AUCKLAND MAJORITY WAS NOT. "ROBBIE", AN INDEPEDENT, WON BY A VOTE OF 18,310 TO 11,634 OVER JAMES ANDERTON WHO HAD BEEN TOUTED AS ONE OF UP-AND-COMING YOUNG LABOUR POLITICANS.

3.. THE ACCEPTED WISDOM THAT LOCAL NEW ZEALAND POLITICS HAVE NO BEARING ON THE NATIONAL SCENE MAY NOW HAVE TO BE RE-EXAMINED. BY WAY OF BACKGROUND, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT LABOUR CANDIDATES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS ALMOST INVARIABLY IDENTIFY WITH THE NZ LABOUR PARTY. THE NATIONAL PARTY DOES NOT ENTER LOCAL RACES BUT IS REPRESENTED IN QUASI-INDEPENDENT CITIZENS AND RATEPAYERS PARTIES. MP'S FROM BOTH PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES STAYED WELL AWAY FROM THE LOCAL CAMPAIGNS, BUT THE LABOUR PARTY AS AN ORGANIZATION PUT CONSIDERABLE MONEY AND MANPOWER INTO THE AUCKLAND AND WELLINGTON RACES. SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF THIS LATTER POINT, ANDERTON'S FAILURE TO MAKE A BETTER SHOWING IN AUCKLAND AND KITT'S PROBLEMS IN WELLINGTON COULD VERY WELL BE INTERPRETED AS VOTES OF NO CONFIDENCE IN LABOUR'S POLICIES NATIONALLY.

4. COMMENT: WHETHER LABOUR'S LOSSES WERE THE RESULT OF A LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE PARTY OR DUE TO LOCAL FACTORS IS PROBABLY ACADEMIC AS THE GENERAL ASSUMPTION WILL BE THAT THE FORMER IS THE CASE. ALREADY HARD PRESSED, LABOUR WILL NOW WANT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT VOTER DISCONTENT IS NOT SNOWBALLING AGAINST IT. THE BEST OPPORTUNITY FOR THIS WILL BE AT THE NOVEMBER 2 SYDENHAM BY-ELECTION WHERE JOHN KIRK IS RUNNING AGAINST A RAG-TAG ASSORTMENT OF INDEPDENDENT AND MINOR PARTY CANDIDATES FOR HIS FATHER'S OLD SEAT. KIRK IS AMOST CERTAIN TO WIN. THE MAJOR QUESTION WILL BY BY WHAT MAJORITY. FIALURE TO MAINTAIN AT LEAST HALF OF HIS FATHER'S 7,000 VOTE MAJORITY WILL BE SEEN AS A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE IN LABOUR. COMBINED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 WELLIN 03248 150520Z

WITH THE RESULTS OF THE LERNMENT ELECTIONS THIS WOULD BE A MAJOR BLOW TO LABOUR.
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Draft Date: 15 OCT 1974
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
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Disposition Authority: shawdg
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
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Disposition Reason:
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